

COL and Mrs. Ball, CSM Gunter, Mr. and Mrs. Wallace, Ms. Hutchinson, Ms. St. Martin, distinguished guests, family and friends of the Flying Dragon Battalion - thank you for coming to our ceremony today to help us celebrate the passing of command from LTC Fred Manzo to LTC Ray Alford.

I extend a warm Arctic Talon welcome to some special guests in attendance today. LTC Retired and Mrs. Fred Manzo, Fred's parents are here from Virginia to be with their son. COL Manzo was a field artillery officer and Russian Foreign Area Officer. Sir, thank you for your service to our Nation. We're honored that you and your wife could join us today and I know you are both very proud of your son as he relinquishes command. COL Manzo's children Samantha and Joseph have also made the trip to Alaska to be with their dad on this proud day. We're happy to have you both here and we wish you a fun trip as you leave here to drive with dad across the country.

Today it is my honor today to pass the mantle of leadership from LTC Manzo to LTC Alford. I have attended countless changes of command in my career, and I never tire of witnessing them. At every ceremony, I am struck by two things. The first thing that I focus on is the very simple passing of the colors that you just witnessed. It takes only a moment, yet the transfer symbolizes so much more - more than can be expressed by mere words. As LTC Manzo passed the colors, his 24 months of command flashed through his mind. His time has sadly passed too quickly, his duty is done. As the incoming commander takes the colors, and he hears for the first time, Manley R. Alford, Lieutenant Colonel, Aviation, Commanding, he stands a little taller. At that instant, the deed is done - he has assumed the reigns of command and all the responsibility that now rests squarely on his shoulders.

The second thing that draws my attention are the faces of the soldiers that stand upon the field - today they are the great officers, non-commissioned officers and enlisted soldiers of the Flying Dragon Battalion. To me, those faces represent

everything that is special about serving in the Army. They are the reason that LTC Manzo has a lump in his throat and the reason that LTC Alford's heart is racing with excitement.

Allow me a few minutes to recount the accomplishments of these Soldiers over the past year. Their composition is perhaps the largest part of the story – for in the ranks before you are Soldiers from the original 1-52nd Aviation Battalion who conducted a unit move from Korea to Alaska just over a year ago. We also have Soldiers from the old 4-123rd Aviation Battalion – a battalion that just 6 months ago returned from a combat deployment to Operation Iraqi Freedom where they flew in excess of 10,000 hours supporting over 2,000 combat missions. In February we merged the two units to form the Army's newest General Support Aviation Battalion. And together over the past half year, this battalion and these Soldiers have undertaken the important mission of transforming Alaska's Aviation Task Force into a modular, deployable combat formation. There are guidons out there on the ramp today that did not exist 4 short months ago – but today they serve as a bold reminder of everything these Soldiers have accomplished in a very rapid few months. It is these Soldiers who have endured the difficult mission of resetting, reorganizing, and retraining. The work has not been easy, and we have by no means stopped the train to allow time for the changes. During recent months, the battalion has supported important training missions for 4/25 ABCT, conducted a battalion FTX, and flown missions in support of Arctic Care in western Alaska and the High Altitude rescue mission in Denali, along with countless medical evacuation missions – all supported by the quite professions of the battalion staff, aircraft maintenance sections, and forward support Soldiers of the battalion. But, these accomplishments didn't just happen - they were a direct result of outstanding leadership. And although he will take no credit, the officer who just passed the colors away deserves a large share of the credit. LTC Manzo's leadership, vision, mission focus, and care for Soldiers were individually responsible for his unit's success during this period of unprecedented growth and change. He has accomplished every mission, from

the large and complex - a move from Korea to Alaska and the stand-up of the GSAB, to the larger and far more important tasks of training and taking care of Soldiers. His leadership has been instrumental to Alaska's aviation transformation; his vision allowed the unit to constitute well ahead of the Army's plan. Aviation Task Force Alaska and 1-52 GSAB are today more capable, more relevant, and more prepared to support the Nation's missions - all a direct result of LTC Manzo's superb command. Fred – congratulations and well done. It has been my honor to serve with you over the past year and I will miss you. God's blessings to you and your family as you take on an important position in the Pentagon where you will lead Army aviation into the future.

The leadership of 1-52nd has now passed to another great officer. LTC Ray Alford is an accomplished leader, a seasoned aviator, and from his last job on the Joint Staff, a commander understands the business of an Army transforming in stride, and the challenges of this fight we are in. Ray – welcome to Alaska and congratulations on your assumption of command. Your mission is simple - make sure these soldiers and these aircraft are prepared to go to war tomorrow. Well, let me reword that – the mission statement is simple - the implied tasks are complex. Lead them, train them, inspire them, and care for them. Cathy, welcome to the Arctic Talon Brigade and Alaska. We wish you all the best and we look forward to getting you and your family settled here soon.

To the soldiers of 1-52 - your commander has changed - your mission is unchanged. Your mission is to stand ready to deploy, engage, and destroy the enemies of the United States of America in close combat. You are the guardians of freedom and the American way of life. You are the finest this Nation has to offer – you are Soldiers, American Soldiers, and I thank you for your service. It is my honor to serve in your ranks.

Arctic Talons!